

Get A Grip on What the Bible says About The Church and Membership

Session 2

Making a List, Checking it Twice: Membership in the Universal and Local Church

Introduction:

Last week we laid the foundation for this study. In this study, we begin looking specifically at the issue of **membership** in the Church.

Church Membership is *a record of the individuals who make up the component parts of the whole church.* This definition gets more specific as we look at membership in the Universal Church and membership in the Local Church.

Some have said that the Bible does not say anything about church membership. Actually, the New Testament teaches that the whole church is composed of many parts (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12) and that a record is kept of who are the parts. Whether by direct statement or clear implication, this language is used to speak of both the Universal and the local church.

I. Membership In the Universal Church

A. Membership in the Universal Church is the same as being truly saved.

1. 1 Peter 2:4-10

B. Membership in the Universal Church is granted by God alone.

1. **1 Corinthians 1:30-31** But ¹by His doing you are in ^aChrist Jesus, who became to us ^bwisdom from God, ²and ^crighteousness and ^dsanctification, and ^eredemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, ^a"LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

2. **Ephesians 2:8-9** For ^aby grace you have been saved ^bthrough faith; and ¹that not of yourselves, **it is ^cthe gift of God;** ⁹ ^anot as a result of works, so that ^bno one may boast.

C. The record of Membership in the Universal Church is kept in heaven by God.

1. **Luke 10:20** ²⁰ "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that ^a**your names are recorded in heaven.**"

2. **Philippians 3:20** For ^aour ¹**citizenship is in heaven**, from which also we eagerly ^bwait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

3. **Philippians 4:3** Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of the gospel*, together with Clement also and the rest of my ^afellow workers, **whose ^bnames are in the book of life.**

4. **Revelation 13:8** All who ^adwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* ^bwhose name has not been ¹written ^cfrom the foundation of the world in **the ^dbook of life of ^ethe Lamb** who has been slain.
5. **Revelation 20:15** And if ¹anyone's name **was not found written in ^athe book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
6. **Revelation 21:27** ²⁷ and ^anothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only **those ¹whose names are ^bwritten in the Lamb's book of life**.

D. Human beings can never be infallibly certain concerning who are the members of the Universal Church because only God can know **the heart**.

1. **Acts 15:8-9** ⁸ "And God, ^awho knows the heart, testified to them ^bgiving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹ and ^aHe made no distinction between us and them, ^bcleansing their hearts by faith.
2. **Romans 2:29** ²⁹ But ^ahe is a Jew who is one inwardly; and ^bcircumcision is that which is of the heart, by the ^cSpirit, not by the letter; ^dand his praise is not from men, but from God.

II. Membership in the Local Church

A. *Ideally*, Membership in the Local Church consists of people who...

1. Are members of the **Universal** Church (truly saved people).
2. **Desire** to be united with a particular local church *for the purpose of worship and growth together as disciples of Jesus Christ*. (see **Hebrews 10:23-25**)

B. Membership in the Local Church is **granted** by the congregation, under the **leadership** of the elders (pastors).

1. **1 Corinthians 5:1-13 → 2 Corinthians 7:5-9**

2. **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for ^bthey keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. ¹Let them do this with joy and not ²with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

C. The congregation keeps a **record** of Membership in the Local Church.

1. **Matthew 18:15-17** (Consider also **1 Corinthians 5**)

D. This leads us to an important Question.

1. **Question:** If membership in the Local Church consists of people who are truly saved, how can the Local Church grant membership and keep a record of membership when we cannot know infallibly who is truly saved?

2. **Answer:** The Scriptures tell us what evidence to look for in order to affirm a person's testimony of salvation.
- i. The Scriptures speak generally of this evidence as “ fruit ” or “ works .”
 - a. Fruit – **Matthew 7:13-23; Galatians 5:16-17**
 - b. Works – **James 2:14-24**
 - ii. If a person claims to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ AND the biblical evidence of faith *is present*, then the church should affirm that testimony of salvation by granting membership.
 - iii. If a person claims to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ and the biblical evidence of faith *is not present*, then the church should not affirm that person's salvation and should not grant membership.
 - a. Choosing not to affirm a person for membership is not the same thing as saying a person is not saved.

III. Important Conclusions

- A. Membership in the Universal Church and membership in the Local Church should **overlap** in some very important ways.
 - 1. Ideally, both consist of truly saved people
 - 2. A member of the Universal Church should be a member of a local church.
 - 3. A member of a local church should be a member of the Universal Church.
- B. In reality, membership in the Universal Church and membership in a local church are different in some very important ways.
 - 1. It is possible for a truly saved person to never unite in membership to a local church.
 - 2. It is possible to be a member of a local church and not be a member of the Universal Church (truly saved).
 - 3. It is possible for a local church to be wrong about whom it affirms or whom it does not affirm as a member (see **1 John 2:19**).
 - 4. The membership record of the Universal Church is perfect b/c God keeps it. The membership record of any local church will always be flawed b/c humans are involved.
- C. Even though no Local Church will ever be perfect at keeping membership records, NO local church should knowingly embrace or promote the imperfections in its own membership record.